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Another danger looming for Israel

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Vitaly Churkin, a representative to the UN from the Russian Federation, talked about the matters that Russia will put on the agenda in March, when it serves as the chairman of the Security Council. Priority will be given to the situation in Afghanistan. The diplomat made it clear that Russia had serious differences with the U.S. on Syria and opposed lifting the embargo on arms supplies to Libya.

Speaking to New York reporters on Monday, March 4th, Churkin said that the UN Security Council will discuss new sanctions against North Korea, the situation in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Mali, Iraq, Somalia, and will hold meetings on the Middle East and Kosovo settlement, as well as will consider the issue of the relations of the Republic of South Sudan with its northern neighbor.

Churkin said that "the key issue of Russia's chairmanship will be the situation in Afghanistan." Ministers of Foreign Affairs will hold an open debate on the situation in the Middle Eastern country. The issue of the extension of the mandate of the UN mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) will be likely resolved. Russia needs to figure out what to do after the withdrawal of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in 2014, and whether they will be withdrawn at all. One thing is clear: the region will remain a zone of perpetual conflict fraught with a civil war and war with Pakistan if the Taliban is not recognized as the legitimate representative of the Pashtuns.

Russia's permanent representative to the UN has made it clear that Russia still had serious differences with the U.S. on Syria, especially after the U.S. recently announced its support for the opposition providing it with "non-lethal" aid. Churkin also said that Israel faced a threat of "a new and very dangerous phenomenon," armed groups operating in the so-called zone of separation between the two countries in the Golan Heights. "It is something that could potentially undermine the security in the relations between Syria and Israel," Churkin said.

Israel and Syria after the war of 1967 technically remained at war, and only have a cease-fire agreement of 1974. The UN peacekeeping force placed in the zone of separation has no mandate for military operations, and therefore, will not be able to prevent violence, Churkin said. His worries are justified, because recently Syrian President Bashar al-Assad announced in an interview with the British newspaper *Sunday Times* that his supporters would revenge (for the bombing of Syria) in their own way, and only the Israelis know what is meant by it. The revenge does not mean bullet for bullet, missile for missile. He added that the method of their vengeance should not be proclaimed publicly. Assad also commented on the U.S. decision to allocate \$60 million of "non-lethal" aid to the Syrian rebels by saying that intelligence tools, communications, and financial assistance will all be very lethal.

Another point worthy of comment is the discussion in the Security Council about lifting the embargo on arms supplies to Libya, introduced by the UN Security Council to overthrow the government of Muammar Gaddafi. Libyan Prime Minister Ali Zaidan said last week that he planned to ask the UN Security Council to lift the embargo. He justified this by saying that the state security forces and the army of Libya were too weak and ill-equipped to regain the control over the territory held by the rebels. Churkin commented that the Libyan government has not yet made a formal request. "Some board members have doubts as to the feasibility of lifting the arms embargo," continued Churkin, noting that the Libyan government was able to buy certain weapons without lifting the embargo, with the approval of the Sanctions Committee of the Security Council.

North African states already have a significant amount of uncontrolled weapons, said Russia's permanent representative to the UN. At a previous meeting of the Security Council, Churkin demanded explanations from Washington asking why at the height of the conflict in Libya, Qatar, "with the encouragement" of U.S., supplied there 20 thousand tons of weapons. The diplomat argued that these weapons could have had a major impact on the security in the region. "With this volume you can equip a small terrorist army that would destabilize the situation in the Sahel region and North Africa, which, in fact, we see today," said Churkin. "The Libyan roots" can be seen in the story of the capture of hundreds of hostages in Algeria. According to some reports, during raids militants used the same weapons as the rebels used fighting the army of Gaddafi. Perhaps in this case the West would support the Russian Federation since Washington still has fresh memories of a wave of violence in Benghazi, when a U.S. ambassador was killed.

Speaking about other agenda items, Churkin said that the UN Security Council would consider a special report of the General Secretary regarding signing a peace agreement and the framework for security cooperation in the DRC and in the Great Lakes region. On the issue of North Korea's nuclear weapons program "an updated package of sanctions" should be adopted that will be "focused in nature, within nuclear activities of DPRK to restart six-party talks and

denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and search for a diplomatic solution to the problem," Churkin said. China, whose delegation has not yet been able to agree with the U.S. delegation on the content and wording of the text of the resolution, had objections.